

RESEARCH | PEER REVIEWED

Dolls4Peace Memorial: Liberatory Community Art Action and Praxis

Rochele Royster^{1*}

¹ Art Therapy & Counseling, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA

*rocroy@hotmail.com

Received: 1 September 2020 Accepted: 1 February 2021 Published: 20 April 2021

Editors: Marisol Norris, Britton Williams, Leah Gipson Reviewers: Melita Belgrave, Akua Boateng, Phyllis West

Abstract

This community/art based participatory research project encompassed communal art making practices (art as therapy) to build community, heal and resist systemic oppression and community violence, as well as promote self-care, empowerment, and a sense of purpose. Using an ecological model, participants engaged in community-based art therapy to build and heal communities impacted by gun violence. This "Doll Project" developed as a grassroots approach to arts-based social change—an ongoing cycle of creation, reflection and action with the hope to create a wave of healing and understanding through impacted Chicago communities. This process was intended to engage communities and embody the use of creativity to shift power and flatten hierarchies, largely by building up leadership of those most impacted by violence. The art of doll making was used to memorialize victims of gun violence in the city in record-high years of murders, while simultaneously creating a memorial of resistance, and initiating community-based adaptive change practices for social equity, connectedness, and liberation. Two questions are highlighted by this research: How does gun violence impact school communities within largely isolated, marginalized urban communities? How can we best support those who witness and survive gun violence?

Keywords: *art therapy, community psychology, public education, public housing, segregation, gun violence, community resistance, doll making, memorial*

Introduction: Normalizing Gun Violence

A bullet pierced through my window just after dusk, shattering what little bit of safety and control I believed I had as a mother. As I was cleaning up dishes on a breezy Chicago night, I heard 16-20 gunshots in rapid succession. A piercing whistle accompanied the shots, and I was certain my living room window had been struck. Hiding in the stairwell, I waited for gunshots to cease. "You good?" followed by a breathless "Did you get hit?" a male voice in my front yard hollered. Another male voice in my neighbor's yard shouted, "I'm good". And then there was silence followed by sirens. This

summer, Chicago has been the bloodiest it has been in years. Shootings are reported daily. The sounds of gunshots echo throughout the night, normalized by our brains, yet sit uneasy in our bodies and bones. In this year alone, this Southside block has had five shootings and two fatalities as groups of young men enact revenge shootings, carelessly taking lives, destroying property, paralyzing innocent elders, and triggering anxiety, Black pain and terror. It is hard to look at your child the next day and explain gun violence and why they cannot play outside. It is difficult to relay as a parent that you do not have ultimate power to keep your home and child safe.

After the shooting, people came out of their homes. The safety of four walls shattered by the night's violence. Older women in flowing printed nightgowns, young professionals in work clothes, daughters and mothers in bed and workout clothes. We stood in a circle, enraged, speaking our frustration, anger, and pain. I stood, shaking from the shock and the dewy Chicago night air, grounded by the strength and resilience. Leaning on the community of women around me.

Areas that have historically struggled through racial segregation, poverty and disinvestment are most impacted by gun violence. The Dolls4Peace art action and memorial highlights the need for routine community-based art therapy in schools and communities to address trauma caused by gun violence. This community-based art making and sharing is needed not only for the youth, but also for families and teachers who are left to mend and pick up the pieces. This project started as a grassroots response to the killing of a local 14-year-old boy but grew out of a larger wound of Black death initiated with the death of Chicago Public School student, 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, who was shot 16 times as he walked away from police. His death, followed by several other violent Black deaths, gives the historical backdrop to this project.

Context: Space and Time

As the city and nation grapple with a global pandemic, spikes in violent crime increased in the city of Chicago. Chicago crime statistics show shootings and murders escalated by more than 50% in 2020 (Struett, 2020). In 2019, there were 2,146 gunshot victims, which increased to 3,261 in 2020 (Struett, 2020). In 2019, 492 were shot and killed (Struett, 2020). In August 2020, 40 youth had been killed by guns (Wire, 2020). By the end of the year, more than 350 juveniles younger than 18 had been shot in Chicago (Smith, 2020). These statistics are sobering as the tally of deaths from guns increase weekly. Trauma caused by gun violence impacts our students and our school communities. What happens in the classroom the day after a student has been shot and killed and that empty seat is silently glaring at the class? How are our teachers and school communities addressing student deaths and community gun violence? At a small Southside Chicago elementary school, the Dolls4Peace project started as an art therapy intervention to resist gun violence trauma and blossomed into a student-led collective art action replicated in over 50 schools in Chicago Public Schools. Teachers, students, and community artists and organizers worked as a collective, bringing to life a memorial of dolls that paid homage to those who lost their lives due to gun violence, to make space for grief, address trauma, and call for more mental health services in schools and a trauma center on the Southside of Chicago.

In 2015, I participated as an educator/researcher with the Museum of Contemporary Art. The Teacher Institute at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago is a radical collective of teachers working to transform classrooms through socially engaged art projects and student-centered art making and curriculum. I was in the process of commencing a community quilting project with a group of diverse learners, which combined community storytelling, quilting, and collective care, when a student from our school community was shot late one October night. I remember going into my classroom the next day, holding a script and putting that script aside. Picking up the art materials gathered around us, I started wrapping the yarn around the fabric, fashioning a small wrap doll. My students sat next to each other, knee to knee, trying to make sense of death and violence. Each person in the room had lost multiple people to gun

violence. They began to mimic my movements, making dolls for each slain person. The craft became contagious as this small group of teenagers began forming dolls out of the recycled fabric, committed to making a doll for everyone that had died that year. They made dolls in the lunchroom, on the playgrounds and even in their kitchens, facilitating safe spaces of art making, storytelling, and testimony. When asked why I initially started to make the doll, I can only draw upon my early experiences around quilting and doll making that I learned from my great grandmother. At this time of stress and uncertainty, my muscle memory took over and the textiles and rhythmic motion, the back and forth of binding, grounded and comforted me. This act of crafting, making grief and pain tangible, proved to be the beginning of our healing.

How do we make space and place for grief in our schools? How are our schools, cultural institutions, and communities addressing the trauma caused by gun violence? This project is a response to the collective trauma caused by gun violence, which echoes and reverberates in our schools, families, and communities, and sits and festers in our bodies and minds.

The Project

The larger intent of this project was to explore community building and engagement, creative resistance and memorialization, through art and social justice practices within alternative art spaces temporarily constructed within institutional public and private settings. Three dominant themes emerged. Doll making as: 1) communal, intentional activism, 2) therapy, and 3) resistance against gun violence through agency and empowerment.

Art availability for individuals within segregated, poor communities is often overlooked. Rarer are the therapeutic art practices within schools to address trauma, self-development, bereavement, and other social/emotional difficulties. The Southside of Chicago, once a mecca for the arts, performance, and music, is now an arts desert; only three art spaces serve youth, teens, and young adults. Neighborhood and community factors such as poverty, unemployment, violence, and under-resourced schools impede the creative development of young people and the larger community.

While art-based liberation therapy cannot alone change discrimination, segregation, and violence in Black communities in Chicago, it can provide coping mechanisms, agency, connections, and community, and it can alleviate stress, offer education to promote understanding, and spark activism within the community.

The Process

The project started with a small group of students in a small elementary school, some identified with learning difficulties and behavioral problems, and transformed into an intergenerational project stretching throughout Chicago. The project grew to community art making that included creative spaces within 50 schools in Chicago Public Schools, five universities and one community art center. Over 1500 people participated in this study by making a doll for a living memorial. Participants had the opportunity to partake in communal artmaking in which a doll was made for each person mortally shot in Chicago starting in 2015. Storytelling, testimonials, and group dialogue were utilized to reflect on the art making process and the experience of gun violence and its impact. After obtaining approval of the institutional review board, data was obtained from participant observation, review of dolls, narratives, and written testimonies with select participants and coded to identify themes.

This study came from a visceral need to address the gun violence that was impacting the culture and climate of the school and the surrounding community. Playing a triad of roles as researcher, educator, and art therapist, I responded to the tragic shooting of a recent graduate of the elementary school by working collectively within an open art studio space in which students created wrap dolls for those mortally wounded by gun violence within Chicago. Students worked communally to wrap, tie, and bind fabric in the shape of a doll and write a narrative on the final piece. The project organically

shifted and moved further into the community and outside of my control when youth started facilitating doll making circles with friends, sharing this method with others.

The practice and ritual involved in the making of the doll, the repetitious act of wrapping, created safety and security during a chaotic time. From the actions and words of the participants, a clear relationship seemed evident between wrapping and doll making, a feeling of easement and positive psychological responses during this process of making, storytelling, processing, and reflection. The process of creating and sharing artwork was intended to recreate community and build trust. The project acted as a container for participants to share stories, seek relief, and find connection with others by engaging in a collective social action effort that intended to create agency, radicalize educational settings, and build hope.

The intention was for the co-participants to in some ways imitate the tribal/communal expression and shared experience by making art side by side. This process created an extraordinary bond among participants with the hope of developing a trusting environment. Emphasis was placed on creative expression through doll making and storytelling. Components of the project included observation, evaluation, art therapy, and communal art production.

The act of making is connecting. It forms social connections on various levels. Within this project there were various points of connections, starting with getting art materials, distributing materials, asking questions, sharing stories, collecting dolls, and assembling and participating in the memorial. Through making and sharing, participants increase engagement and connections with our social and physical environments. The project increased solidarity, allowing participants to become active agents rather than passive subjects, increasing their sense of belonging, and empowering communities to work together to enact change.

Community Arts: Activism, Exhibition & Research

Barndt (2008) stated, “community arts is often implicitly a critique of the domination of Western mass media and popular consumer culture” (p. 353). According to Barndt (2008), the purpose of community arts is to raise consciousness through education and information about ourselves and the world. It should 1) inspire and mobilize individuals and groups, 2) nurture and heal people and communities, and 3) build and improve community capacity.

Partnerships and connections were key to this process. This process of public exchange extended the role of audience beyond spectator to that of participant, extended the role of student and teacher to that of artist/activist, and extended the role of public space to that of memorial and social collaborative art action. It reimagines the relationship of art to place and people, jarring people into seeing and thinking differently. A form of creative empowerment, this project addressed trauma through the arts, making beauty to inspire hope, and forging links between creative art therapies and the broader community.

Society through media and art has shown what it believes poverty looks like. The stereotypes abound—from the welfare queen to the drug dealer, the chronic violence and the low-test scores are stories that the dominant society has created. Perceptions of Blackness, poverty, and public schools are framed by a host of negative images and assumptions that began during slavery, persisted, and still exist today with permutations. Cultural resistance is the practice of using meanings and symbols, that is, culture, to contest and combat a dominant power, often encouraging change by constructing a new narrative and vision of the popular belief. Weingarten (1996) believed that sharing one's life experience is a form of cultural resistance and a challenging of cultural beliefs. The use of narratives, storytelling, and art amplifies voices through respectful, nonjudgmental listening and group dialogue. Creating art communally within discursive settings is creative cultural resistance and works to destroy apathy, increase coping strategies, nurture empowerment through creative resistance, and build

a sense of community and connection. This shared encounter acted as a connecting factor—bringing individuals together in the cultivation of a sense of belonging.

Memorials and Ritual in Grief and Trauma

Rituals and memorials are ancient ways of coping with tragedy. Ritual is an act while a memorial is a space, both invested in meaning. This section discusses the importance and the role of both ritual and memorialization during times of grief, tragedy, and crisis.

One of the first written accounts in history of rituals is *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, which describes rituals that should accompany death (Faulkner et al., 2015). Rituals infuse the common with meaning. Examples of this are rituals using water to cleanse the body and soul, signifying rebirth. Water is a common everyday item, but the meaning behind the ritual makes the water different and significant. Ritual indicates a passage or transition and engages both the conscious and the unconscious. Ritual makes action meaningful and offers structure during disorganized times, providing reorganization and the feeling of taking action. Walking meditation, a Zen ritual, is a practice of intentional, quiet, and mindful walking that is meant to connect and ground an individual (Heine & Wright, 2008). Ritual reaffirms community, mending the fragments caused by crisis, creating opportunities for people to stand as one, together in unity and solidarity. Public ritual reconstructs the narrative by offering an interpretation of the event and affirmations that victims will not be forgotten. It also creates space for people to reconcile by writing notes or letters to victims.

A memorial is a space (public or private) set aside such as the AIDS Quilt, which honors people who have died from AIDS. A memorial is space set aside to remember, discuss, and process. Public memorials and rituals provide social validation and support public recognition of the collective loss. They tap into our archetypes as a collective people—part of the human family.

Craft Culture as Liberatory Art Therapy/Art Action

There are therapeutic benefits to “doing”. Researchers have studied the therapeutic benefits of fiber arts, such as quilters making quilts to cope with difficult times (Dickie, 2010). Black enslaved women spent hours quilting after working in the fields, and after Reconstruction, quilting was more than a practical need—it was a form of creative expression, as can be found in Gees Bend quilts and Harriet Powers’s story quilts. Quilting keeps the mind busy, acting as a form of meditation. At the end of the task there is a feeling of accomplishment, although there may still be feelings of turmoil and distress. This act of “doing” is also seen in knitting, gardening, cooking, and other craft arts. The individual uses the activity to achieve a desired state of mind (Dickie, 2010). When coupled with activist acts, craft culture rethinks traditional activism. It becomes an indirect activism promoting real social change indirectly through cultural action (Chansky, 2010).

Method

At the very beginning of the initiative, 18 African American students participated, all with identified learning differences such as ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, bipolar disorder and depression. Teachers and administration at the school noted a culture of apathy, poor academic performance, and poor attendance among the participants. At the time of this research, a 14-year-old student, a recent graduate of the school and resident within the housing complex, was shot and killed on the West Side of Chicago. The shooting devastated the small student body. Students were grief stricken—unable to focus, function, or concentrate.

The day after the shooting, the researcher gathered students together and began wrapping and tying fabric into dolls. The circle became a healing space for students to talk about their fears and intentions around death and gun violence. Participants used

the space to remember relatives and friends shot and killed in Chicago. They used the space to create a memorial for 447 victims slain by gun violence within the year of 2015–2016.

Field texts, such as stories, testimonials, conversations, and dolls were used to assess and analyze the participants' process and any benefits of the experience. Artwork was used to stimulate conversations about death, violence, and grief. Narrative inquiry and doll making were used as therapeutic tools to understand how the participants recognize and cope with violence within their communities and deal with grief within the educational setting. Story-telling and doll making was used as a tool to create action and change. The doll project was recreated throughout various Chicago communities bringing dialogue, awareness, and hope around the issue of gun violence and the importance of community during times of grief and sudden loss.

Narratives can be viewed as a frame through which people make sense of their lives. A narrative perspective suggests that experience is both conscious and unconscious, re-storied stories retold and relived through the process of reflection. Narrative inquiry is the re-storying of the narrative structure, focusing on experience (Leavy, 2017). Stories were used to understand a participant's viewpoint. The multi-method research included ethnography, exhibition as social action, and narrative inquiry. A narrative approach was applied, as participants wrote stories about their dolls. Narrative inquiry is increasingly used as a methodological approach in trauma studies, focused on the process of trauma and recovery. Narratives were coded in the following categories: narratives/archetypes of 1) suffering, 2) helplessness, 3) hope, and 4) resistance.

Participants were asked to make a doll using the materials and were asked to write a story about their doll. These stories are narratives important to the individual, but together the themes provide a collective narrative about the community around death and gun violence. Community narratives are derived from the interviewing process, analysis of the dolls and stories, and the interpretation process (Olson et al., 2016). Psychologically, testimony is important; speaking and writing about trauma initiates the healing and recovery process.

The artwork produced during the project was an important and essential part of this study. Exhibition and memorialization can operate as an agent of social change. Two examples are the AIDS Quilt (a quilt to memorialize people who have died from AIDS), and Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei's attempt to bring awareness to Syrian refugees' deaths by drowning (by covering a Berlin landmark with 14,000 life jackets). These are two examples of artists/ artist collectives developing socially engaged art-based methods for engaging individuals, audiences, and communities in the production of art in which collaboration, cooperation, and social participation is encouraged. Art practices that include socially participatory events and performative actions and happenings, challenge the normative institutional boundaries of gallery and museum and how communities engage or disengage in them (Decter & Draxler, 2014). Cleveland (2000) stated that community arts can nurture many purposes: to educate and inform us about ourselves and the world, to inspire and mobilize, to nurture and heal, to build and improve community capacity. Barndt (2008) explained that "the process of engaging in community arts is in itself a research process, a collaborative process of producing knowledge" (p. 353).

Beyond the origin of the project, the initiative was expanded and replicated by different schools and teachers. As teachers heard about the project, they too reached out to the researcher for help. The teachers were also experiencing trauma from gun violence experienced in their school communities. They were left feeling helpless, alone and afraid when confronting the realities of student deaths. Teacher participants were given a lesson plan/protocol with a box of art supplies ordered through the Dolls4Peace website. Teachers or student leaders led the group and stimulated conversations about gun violence, death, healing, and community. It is important to note that the power of healing was transferred from the researcher/therapist to the community.

Emphasis was placed on the artistic process as a means of emotional expression and as a springboard for conversation, the formation of narratives, and the exploration of



Figure 1
Hands Up. Don't Shoot Doll

emerging archetypes. During the process, the focus was on the release of toxic emotions that are considered stressful to the physical, affective, and cognitive domain. Stories written about the dolls, personal testimonials, and reflections of the subjects and researcher were also used to evaluate individual engagement upon completion of the project.

The doll making method of wrapping and binding fabric to make a rag doll was administered in this study by an art therapist, art therapy interns, art educators, and student leaders. The focus of the study centered on the natural healing aspects of the art materials, identification, expression, and transformation of emotions through art production and the communal aspect of making art in a group. As the primary researcher, I assumed the role of artist, therapist, teacher, mentor, and confidant.

The following text explains the procedures of the sessions that took place. Initially, I facilitated eight workshops in Chicago, including an introductory doll making workshop for Chicago Public School art education teachers and social workers. The next section details the protocol and lesson plan included in the Dolls4Peace project box, including a list of materials required for the project, along with detailed explanations and/or rationale for each session.

Materials

This section includes a list of the art materials obtained before the start of the project. It was important to include a variety of fabrics and found objects so that the participants would be able to choose exactly what medium represented the mood, emotion or narrative they were feeling and composing. The following materials were used: acrylic paints and brushes, several fine point black drawing markers, scissors, glue, a collection of found objects, such as buttons, shells, stones, ribbons, string, costume jewelry, a collection of assorted fabric swatches of different textures, such as lace, velvet, burlap, satin, several needles of various sizes, yarn, and crochet hooks.

The Sessions /Doll Workshop

The protocol/lesson plan reflected a communal art experience, narrative therapy, and narrative inquiry. Fiber arts in the form of doll making were used to initiate narratives around gun violence, social justice, and creative resistance. The dolls were collected after each session/workshop and mailed or dropped off at the exhibit space. The dolls were used to construct a memorial/ art installation at the Hyde Park Art Center. Partic-



Figure 2
Wrap Doll

Participants were invited to the event to memorialize victims, celebrate life through shared food, song, and meditative walking and affirmation reading, and to make an intentional pact to create spaces of peace for the summer.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits of a liberatory art therapy/socially engaged project and exhibit with a focus on trauma and psychological alienation brought about by gun violence—a symptom of poverty, segregation, and faulty educational reform practices. The best means of knowing and understanding a community is to record and listen to their personal voices. The dolls, eventually 1,405, were created by participants, and each person was asked to tell a story about their doll. Many participants chose instead to write what they were thinking, give a testimonial, reflection, and a solution. These writings were evaluated and separated into two types of narratives: stories about the dolls and testimonials. This data was transferred into codable form. The stories were coded and sorted into archetypes, and the testimonials were coded into themes. An explanatory schema for the findings was generated.

Narratives, Archetypes, and Testimonials

Fifty stories created by fifth-grade elementary students, college students, and teachers in Chicago were coded into Jungian archetypes. Archetypes are universal symbols: character, theme, symbol, or setting. Carl Jung (Jung & Franz, 1964) stated that archetypes are experiences shared by a race, culture, or group of people that become part of our collective unconscious. The hero archetype appears in religions, myths, and fairy tales across the world. Personal myths can govern the life course of individuals—in most cases unconsciously. Unconscious images/energies are given form through art, literature, and religion.

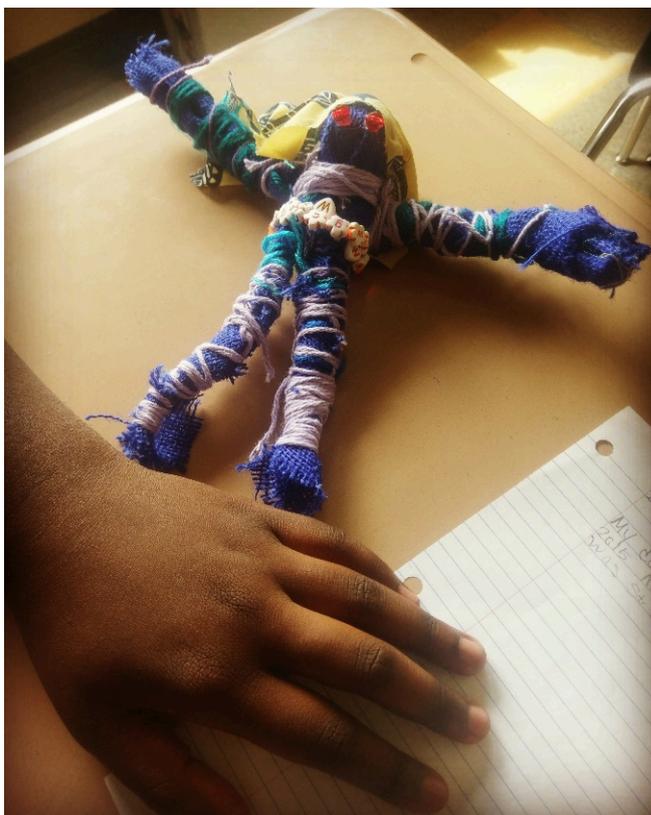


Figure 3

A child writes a narrative to go with their doll.

Testimonials were coded based on themes that consistently surfaced. The following section provides an analysis of these stories and testimonials. Out of the 50 stories, the two Jungian archetypes that appeared the most were the *hero* and *caregiver*. These two archetypes and their cultural implications are examined and explored in the next section. It should be noted that the association between the stories and archetypes may be spurious, perhaps having an alternative causation for the selection of the archetypes by the participants. Limitations also include the potential for other psychological variables that potentially influenced the selection of a specific archetype.

Hero

The hero archetype is the warrior that tries to overcome bad (good versus evil). The core desire of the hero is to prove one's worth through courageous acts. The hero fears appearing weak and vulnerable and tries to be as strong and competent as possible (Jung & Franz, 1964). The hero may also be arrogant and always searching for the next battle to fight. Out of 43 stories, 11 were categorized as the hero archetype. Many of the heroes also had magical powers or unusual strength, showing the influence of modern media on the hero archetype. People need the hero archetype to confront the darkness in the world, the ultimate fight between good versus evil in the world and within the self (Jung & Campbell, 1971). The individual is able to remain the innocent victim waiting to be rescued, powerless, immobilized and without action.

Many of the stories written by grade school students characterized their hero as being wealthy, good at sports and having a lot of money. Students in low social-economic households often valued possessions such as Nike Air Jordans and name brand clothes and cars as a way to gain status and importance. This was reflected in their hero stories. Heroes imagined by high school students were compelled to find peace for the world and to stop the violence.

These archetypes are useful as a coping mechanism and were repeated in behaviors of waiting to be rescued or relying on the super person to save the day or stop the violence; the problem of violence is so overwhelming, terrifying, and heartbreaking that only a superhero can stop it. Coupled with collective feelings of alienation and isolation perpetuated by poverty and segregation, this thinking can be detrimental, immobilizing, and promote learned helplessness in the African American community. The following excerpts are from the students' hero narratives.

I would like my doll to save the people that are going to die. My doll can help the bad people be good. The doll knows when people are going to die. He is a wall that can block shots and he can fly!

My doll represents my uncle who served in the military and came back and survived. I made my doll look like a regular person with shorts and green shirt with a cap saying "CJ" meaning Caption J. Meaning that he has served and protected our country from hurt harm and danger. He is a Hero to me because he didn't have to fight for are country but out the kindness of his heart and belief he did anyway. My uncle CJ is my hero, the U.S.A hero, my family's hero just like all the others who served for our country. the gun on the doll represents when he was in the military he was the sniper hiding out on high buildings assassinating enemies.

The doll represents my grandpa since he passed away this year. The decoration on my doll represents a cool, superhero figure. The gold part represents how he can cheer up people like make them feel great and make their day even better since gold is like a light color it gives out light and hope. The black cape represents a superhero like vibe since he always helped out as well as helped my older brother and I with things. The doll makes me remember all the good times we had.

My doll represent a hero with fur that it's so soft, meaning that the theme of the doll is hoping that one day we will get peace from the violence that we're having in this city. I made the doll with these tiger like fur wrapped around the legs and arms so that would show we have strength in ourselves. A cape like a superhero also made of soft material to show if we fight we would get peace and quiet.

This doll is a ninja which represents silence. Moving in silence is the best thing to do. You become invisible to negativity. The cloth covers the face separating self from Chicago.

The first narrative was written by a fifth grader. The superhero is addressing the violence and is able to stop bullets and people from dying. The child is expressing his fears, recognizing the villain and identifying the superhero to combat and fight the evil. The following narratives were written by high school students. They have identified real people as their heroes—some alive, as in the military figure, and some who have died, such as the grandfather. Life experiences and learning from mistakes eventually encourage awareness and better choices in life. The older students seem to connect their hero to a real and/or tangible person. Someone they know or knew, perhaps looking for that model to copy as a life mentor or coach.

Caregiver

The caregiver is the archetype that is fulfilled and sustained by taking care of others. The caregiver is moved by authentic compassion to help others through dedicated assistance and generosity (Jung & Franz, 1964). The caregiver fears selfishness and ingratitude and overcomes this fear by doing things for others. The caregiver weaknesses are martyrdom and being exploited and is also known as earth mother (Jung & Franz, 1964). Out of 43 stories, 14 were categorized as caregiver. Narratives of caregiver included:

This doll represents my grandmother. Before my grandmother died she used to love and care for me. She used to babysit for my mother. Every night I used to kiss my grandmother. She is always in my heart forever and ever until I die and leave this Earth. Until now, all I can say to this doll is RIP to my sweet beautiful, peaceful, caring, and lost by not forgotten and loving grandmother.

My doll was created to absorb all the stress and trauma and grief we experience on a daily basis. It's meant to help ease the stress that surrounds our life and our communities.

When I see the doll, I see a sacred light and it lets me feel that the light is protecting the [helpless] woman.

This doll represents my grandmother who always stood up for what is right. But not only does my doll represent her but also the fact of people putting up a stand to violence and coming together peacefully. The white soft fur on the doll shows that this doll isn't meant to feel rough or painful but soft and something that comforts you. The feather in the hand shows the doll stating that her weapon is peace and not danger. She has white hair because she is wise and strong referring back to my grandmother but also all the older people out there trying to get us young people to stay safe and stop using violence. The hearts are basically saying that I keep my grandmother in my heart and the letters around the base of the doll spell out the word 'peace' all around. The cape shows that she's flying high in heaven and she's watching over me.

This doll is special and can cure anyone exposed to violence.

The caregiver gives love unconditionally and cares for others selflessly. This story is important to the individual who may feel alienated and isolated from society and humanity. The imaginary figure, embodied by an actual family member, most often deceased, provides love, support, care, and acceptance—all that is not readily available in the real world. This can be harmful in that adults may carry out the archetype to the extent of stifling those they care for—further alienating themselves and others or become angry or upset when they feel that they are not appreciated.

Archetypes and myths teach and organize our lives. It is the unconscious human desire to give content and processes of the collective unconscious concrete form. The hero and caregiver reflect each other and have the same motivating orientation (Jung & Campbell, 1971). For example, the caregiver is driven by the need to fulfill ego agendas through meeting the needs of others, which is a social orientation; whereas, the hero, which is also driven by the need to fulfill ego agendas, does so through courageous action that proves self-worth. These unconscious behavior patterns found in the doll narratives can be used to decipher the internal motivations of the writers. Those who wrote about the hero are searching for self-worth and grappling with the ideas of good versus evil. The caregiver narratives came mostly in the form of a woman/grandmother type figure reminiscent of a mammy or Aunt Jemima stereotypically caring and helping at the expense of herself.

The House as Archetype

The house is one of the most common dream symbols and was a common theme in the narratives. Humans seek a secure place that is fundamentally their own. The earliest home is the womb and humans are forever seeking to replace that perfect paradise. The house is also a metaphor for personality. Is it tidy, well-kept, or falling apart? The house also symbolizes the inner world. Jung and Franz (1964) stated that the house is a universal symbol and a reflection of the individual in the house. Jungian therapy is much attuned to the theme of house, especially at times of crisis. This researcher suggests that the archetypal symbols for “projects,” “ghetto,” and “public housing” are problematic for those living within, causing alienation and feelings of demoralization. Media portrays the projects as violent, dirty, poor, and neglected. Children internalize these ideas and often think of their homes as less than and not good enough, which causes internal conflict and uncertainty. Many of the narratives contained stories about “big” houses and rooms as if to compensate for those inner conflicts. On the other hand, public housing projects also have a rich history of community and activism, which is being eroded by increasingly transient living situations causing distrust, anxiety, and uneasiness.

Fifty testimonials were evaluated for themes and patterns. Testimonials were given by Chicago high school students speaking about their personal experiences with gun

violence, its impact on their lives, and possible solutions to the violence. The testimonials spoke of neighborhoods riddled with fear and violence, youth afraid to go to the park or play outside, and heartbreaking tales of friends and family members whose lives were snatched away unexpectedly by gun violence. Some students pondered how to create safe healing spaces and resist oppressive systems and institutions. Students asked for more counselors, programs, and community centers “so teens can be inside safe versus outside doing nothing—where anything can happen at any time.” Some asked for more community-oriented police officers who are part of the community and there to help rather than harass. Eighty-one percent of testimonials reflected the themes of alienation, isolation, and numbness to the violence. Over 85% of the stories indicated students were always operating on high alert, fearful to leave their homes and neighborhoods. Only 12.5% of testimonials did not have a direct experience with gun violence but stated that they were negatively impacted by violence via social media and the news, to the point of being fearful and paranoid that gun violence may happen to them at any time. Some excerpts from these testimonials include:

I can't go outside for too long; I worry every time someone I know is out for too long and they're not replying to my messages.

No place on Earth is safe.

I watch my surroundings.

Growing up in Little Village was tough, there was tons of violence. There was a point where I wasn't able to go to the park because my parents thought I wouldn't come back alive. They were scared, the Chicago violence really affected my childhood, but then I was introduced to this program called beyond the ball. It really changed my life, its purpose was to make Little Village safe for the kids to play at the park and not be scared of getting shot or killed.

These past few days a lot has happened, one of our classmates died due to the gun violence going on. This also happened last year another one of our classmates had died because of this too. Chicago is becoming more violent every day and it's causing us to feel unsafe to the point where we can't go out. This is why I want people to look at my doll and think that there's still hope for all of us. We need to find a way to stop all of this violence because for us living here is becoming a normal everyday thing and it shouldn't be like that.

Violence in Chicago has really took a toll inside of my life. Just growing up around violence and losing people that I've loved to it is one of the toughest things I've faced in my life. I probably have lost "5" people in the last 3 years to violence in Chicago. I feel as if where I'm from we really don't have a choice but to act violent and that's upsetting.

Systems and institutions can oppress because kids in this generation gets lots of pressure from home and from school...the schools want kids to deal with so many problems at once, so they feel like everyone is just there to use them and nobody is really there for them at times.

The Gun and Doll as Archetype

The gun and doll represent archetypes in our culture and are often the first toys that little girls and boys gravitate towards. The gun represents an archetype masculine Animus in its original form. It can protect and kill and is a symbol of power and prestige.

The doll is the oldest known toy, used as an educational tool, ritual, protection, and in religious ceremonies. The doll has also been used to tell stories and myths of culture. The gun and doll represent female and male parts, which must be balanced. The contextual idea of building a memorial of dolls to combat deaths from gun violence completes a metaphorical balance within the art as a type of intervention. The act of making a memorial out of whimsical dolls enacted tangible change within a united Chicago community afflicted by gang violence/activity. The meetings of students and teachers to create the dolls, and then the meeting at the memorial site, created a sense of place, ownership, and home—a site of possibility where change might be initiated.

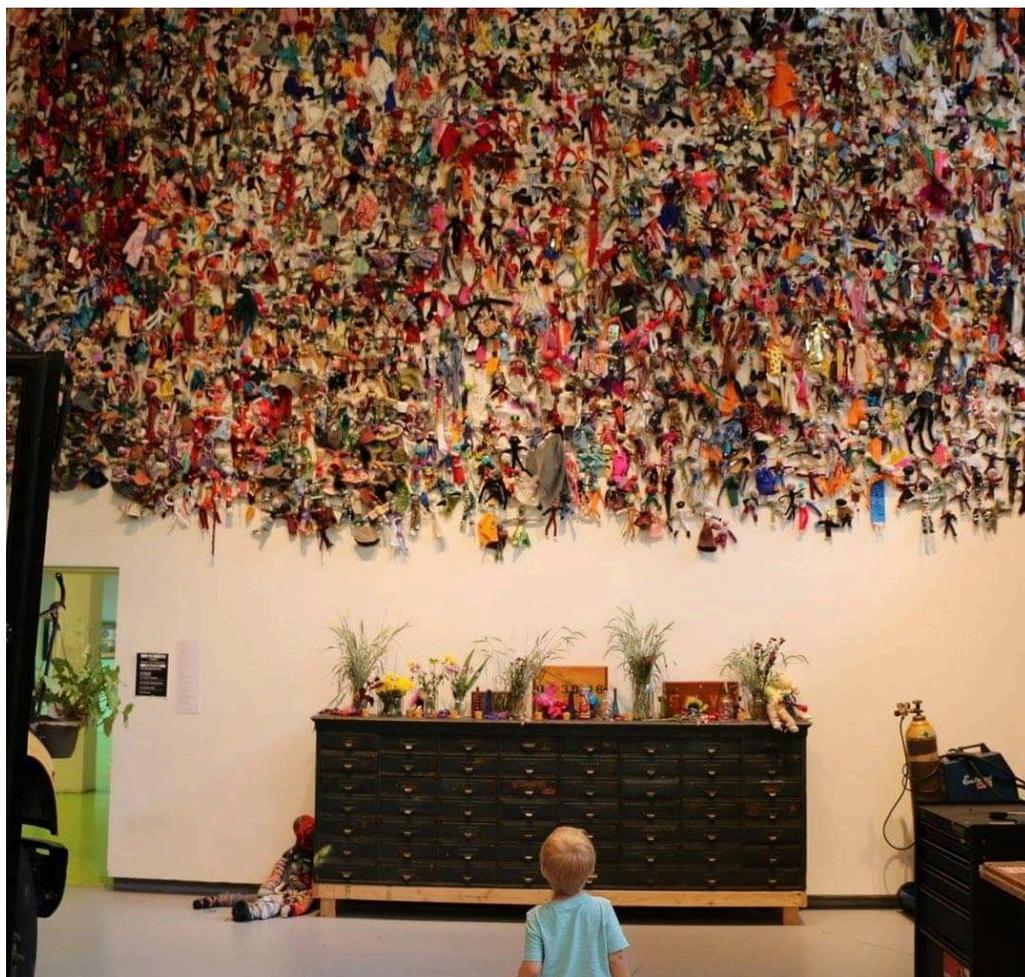


Figure 4

Hyde Park Art Center Dolls4Peace Memorial (Photo by Nick Hostert)

Discussion

Death rivets our attention. A glimpse of death reminds us of how valuable life is allowing one to reprioritize and reconsider life and life choices. Traumatic events like school closures in majority-Black neighborhoods, shootings, and the death of classmates can create moments of community and patriotism. In the US, the tragedies of 9/11, Sandy Hook, and Columbine are examples of people rallying around each other to support, grieve, and protest. Recently, the insurgence on the US Capitol sparked protest, grief, and outrage, leading to awareness and changes in attitudes and policy. The understanding that something is shared between people creates communion and forms bonds from processing and reflecting on the phenomenon, encouraging community and action. Certainly the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Laquan McDonald, and Freddie Gray sparked nationwide outrage, protest, violence, and action.

Where is the rallying of the community around the gun violence in our urban communities? Where is the outrage and empathy from others outside of the community? How can we best support those who witness and survive this type of violence? The Trump/Pence White House administration and others have called Chicago's gun violence a morality issue instead of looking at the root causes of the violence, further demonizing and alienating populations that have systematically been oppressed, marginalized, and abused. Chicago mayor, Lori Lightfoot, has blamed the increase in gun violence on lenient gun laws in neighboring states and coronavirus-related lockdowns. She said Chicago's poverty problem is complicated, but fails to acknowledge gun violence as a symptom of racist policies, generational poverty, segregation, lack of opportunities, and a school system that stifles instead of encourages creativity.

Systemic racism enforces poverty and alienation within the Black community. The unequal distribution of wealth, income, and power is based on a white supremacist racial caste system. The constant threat of violence causes toxic stress, which affects the health of the body and brain. When the brain is constantly exposed to a toxic environment, it will shut down to protect itself from that environment (Young, 2016). The brain's rate of growth slows down, creating a vulnerability to anxiety and depression, and less resilience to stress. Research shows the younger the brain, the more damaging the effects causing problems with impulse and emotional control. Art, community, and dialogue can help a child see the world as less threatening and build self-esteem by giving meaningful praise and opportunities to succeed and gain a sense of mastery. This project offered opportunities for communities to connect and engage in collective social action to address gun violence, supported creative student-centered educational activities, built positive connections between teachers and students, and encouraged safe havens for social change.

Need and Focus for Further Research

Tens of thousands of people are killed every year as a result of gun-related injuries (Basu, 2014). Many more suffer non-fatal gun wounds that result in long-term disabilities that may result in long-term mental health problems such as post-traumatic syndrome disorder (Hill-Evans, Mitton, Sacks, 2018). Many more suffer from the fear and insecurity of living with daily gun violence. The issue of gun violence must be addressed by healthcare professionals as well as examining its impact on urban schools, educators, and students. Research that is interdisciplinary in scope is needed because gun violence impacts various professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, nurses, principals, teachers, social workers, and rehabilitation specialists, to name a few. Unfortunately, gun violence prevention research in the United States has been heavily politicized, causing federal funding to come to a halt in 2012 due to lobbying efforts of the National Rifle Association (Kellermann & Rivara, 2013). Gun violence is a public health crisis and its prevention is understudied and underfunded (Hills-Evans et al., 2018). We must act and support those who witness and survive gun violence through further gun violence prevention research.

Conclusion

It's hard to know a person and see them every day and then for them to just disappear.
(Dolls4Peace teacher and participant)

Students are “disappearing” from classrooms every day from gun violence. A school that participated in the Dolls4Peace Memorial had 10 students “disappear” in four months. How is gun violence and the resulting deaths affecting youth and teachers psychologically? Transient housing, school closures, and anti-Black rhetoric within our society encourage feelings of alienation and isolation in the Black population. These feelings of worthlessness, numbing to violence, and the idea that justice is not for them perpetuates violence. Interlocking issues such as poverty, segregation, and educational inequities are issues that are forced on a population of people that lacks agency to affect policy and systems that continue to oppress and marginalize.

Student narratives emphasize programs and activities that give solace and “save them from the streets” such as Beyond the Ball, dance classes, art centers and after-school programs. These programs and activities provide opportunities for youth to engage with each other, with mentors, and to learn and build skills, giving life meaning and purpose.

Karl Marx wrote about the power of work and realizing our worth and creativity through our work. Marx believed “what we do” is directly linked to “who we are” (McLellan, 1973). Our work defines us and allows us to express ourselves, creatively empowering us and giving us agency in our lives. While capitalism has taken this joy

away from work, promoting alienation and individualism, community arts connects us to our creativity and connects us to society, work (the act of doing), and self. This study was an art therapy intervention that used the power of visual art, public exhibition, and memorialization to provoke, evoke, and express nonverbal knowledge as a collective action for social change.

What does the practice of making, the repetitious act of wrapping, achieve for those who participated in the Dolls4Peace Memorial? What is the relationship between wrapping and doll making and psychological responses to trauma and easement? Can art exhibitions/installations be community or cultural interventions? This community-based participatory research project empowered students and teachers to initiate and find their solutions to problems, becoming agents of change and enacting the therapeutic benefits of “doing” (Dickie, 2010).

Art, it can be argued, heals and empowers. Art can be used to nurture self-awareness and expression. School communities need to address the social and emotional needs in urban schools riddled with a persistent normalization of poverty. Art interventions can provide a foundation for growth and advocacy within a community. The opportunity to talk about difficult issues and problems and express through imagery is both preventive and interventive, especially in times of potential or escalating violence. Art builds bridges and can acknowledge all members and honor all parts of the psyche. Funders and policy makers have long understood the need for character education, mental health services, and arts education and exposure, but the idea of a liberation-based art therapy has always been something less fundable—a luxury that cannot be afforded.

Yet art can be used as a way that meets many stated, societal goals. Art can be used in a community to uncover, interpret and create the community’s identity (Rappaport, 2000). Art plays an essential role in the creation and evolution of the spirit and soul. It provides an alternate mode of communication to help us understand and communicate feelings that may be too difficult to express in words. The arts, and the culture and education it affords, can foster empowerment, encouraging identity development and personal and social change (Rappaport, 2000). Teens who show an absence of hope for the future reflect their despair at not being able to make an impact on their lives and environments (Rose, 2009). Pent-up emotions and aggressive behaviors are released in destructive and explosive ways, sometimes as a way for powerless and alienated youth to regain power and connection to others. Black youth may internalize negative feelings fed to them by mainstream society and reinforced by the educational system that they are unlovable, insignificant, and inferior. Additionally, experiences of helplessness further mobilize rage and hatred (Akhtar et al., 1995). The child that displays violence and aggression is often shamed and further alienated, creating a vicious cycle. This cycle can be caught earlier, and reparations made through adult offers of support and empathy, found in community arts, helping to inculcate a sense of being valued and allowing space for youth to share feelings and gain an understanding of what is happening within their minds. Art, storytelling and group dialogue provides a vehicle for expressing the shadow or repressed emotions in productive ways, allowing the individual to grow closer to self-actualization. Art enables individuals to use images to explore parts of the self that were lying beneath one’s awareness (Jung & Franz, 1964). Both Freud and Jung believed that neurosis occurs when unacceptable material is repressed and becomes unconscious. This repressed material eventually expresses itself through instinctual behavior. People have a basic need to “belong” and deep psychological urges to overcome this feeling of separateness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Maslow (1958) developed the hierarchy of needs framework, proposing a pyramid of growth toward self-actualization. The fundamental step, beyond the meeting of basic needs, is acceptance or belonging within the community. Community-based art therapy allows participants to join a meaningful ritual-oriented communal activity, fulfilling that psychological need to be part of a caring community.

The shared encounter of ritual and memorialization in creating the Dolls4Peace Memorial acted as a connecting factor, bringing individuals together in the cultivation

of a sense of belonging. One thousand four hundred and five (and counting) dolls were made for each person mortally shot in Chicago between the years 2015 and 2017. Fifty-five Chicago Public Schools and five universities, including one in Philadelphia and Oakland, California participated in the action. The memorial facilitated dialogue, processing fears and intentions, and used doll making to support the growth of self-awareness and individuation. The creative process and public memorialization developed an outlet for repressed feelings and allowed expression in a meaningful and sustainable way. Out of 80 testimonials, 91.5% percent stated that doll making was "healing" and/ or "helped" them. Participants expressed that they felt calm and relaxed. They felt that "remembering" their loved ones by making dolls offered solace. Some expressed that they were standing up to the violence with peace, and that they learned different ways to cope with negative feelings like vengeance and revenge.

Characteristics of both content and form distinguish this project from traditional socially engaged art projects. This project was both a form of exhibition as social change, and protest-art as therapy, providing a sense of community and shared solidarity. The imagery of the dolls initially catches the viewer off guard. Doll making carries associations to childhood, little girls, security of items made and bought for comfort or whimsy. Viewers are open to communicating through the art of dolls, instead of turning away with discomfort. Thus, the community arts therapy approach constitutes a strategy for peacemaking, consciousness building, and interconnectedness that challenges the dominant social order of schools and cultural art centers/institutions by creating an alternative discourse to the traditional ideas of education, therapy, and art.

The alienated, isolated, and separated individual is prone to disappear into mass conformity and meaningless destruction (Rose, 2009). Community art re-imagines that isolation, providing connectedness and fulfilling the innate need to belong that humans have. When there is such a dark cloud of secrecy and repression around gun violence and death, structured rituals and containment become secure places to process and reflect on feelings and thoughts in communal settings, encouraging participants to make their own healing/peace spaces in their classrooms, parks, homes, and churches.

Examining and exploring archetypes and life patterns tells us about our formative stories. How is the past (historical and generational) active in our present lives? Understanding our stories hidden in our unconscious that are dictating our life patterns is important in order to stop the cycle of alienation, isolation and demoralization resulting in community violence and self-defeating behaviors. How have we adapted to oppression and racism? What are our conditioned responses, and how can these responses be transformed to ignite collective activism and social change? Community arts and liberatory art therapy allows participants to connect to the thought forms and mental images that influence an individual's feelings and actions, but also transcends the individual by connecting that individual to others, to community. This study highlights a need to build more holistic, community-centered, arts-based therapeutic interventions within public institutions and communities to address trauma caused by gun violence, oppressive systems, and alienation caused by systemic racism and generational poverty.

This project emphasized prevention and early intervention with a focus on the strengths of communities rather than on individual or community deficits or problems (Rappaport, 2000) This project was able to build upon pre-existing resources, capacities, and talents of the community, transcending education spaces to be responsive to communities and transforming artistic practice from mere catharsis to a revolutionary call to action. Rick Ayers (2015) asks in his book *An Empty Seat in Class*, "How could the field of (urban) education not be talking about student homicide and how teachers experience it?" (p. 105). I push this question further. How can the fields of education and therapy not address the acute and vicarious trauma experienced from gun violence for both teachers, students and the communities in which they reside? We cannot ignore the impact of gun violence and student homicide on teaching and learning in the urban classroom. We must give ourselves permission to move forward, through our collective pain, to find resilience and community in times of trauma and pain.



Figure 5
Dolls4Peace (Photo by Rochele Royster)

About the author

Rochele Royster, Ph.D, ATR-BC is an artist, art therapist, community psychologist and educator in Chicago. She has worked for the last 20 years integrating art therapy into the educational setting working with neurodivergent youth, adolescents and their families. She has taught at the Department of Art Therapy and Counseling at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Depaul University (Department of Education) and Adler School of Psychology (Clinical Psychology Department Doctoral Program). Using a transdisciplinary approach, she is interested in community and school-based art therapy; race, power and policy in education, multisensory methods in reading and literacy, trauma informed classrooms; environmental justice; black disability and special education as it relates to liberation of pedagogy and practice in institutional and public settings. Her dissertation developed as a grassroots approach to arts-based social change and addresses gun violence, death and grief through memorials of resistance. She assisted in creating transformative art based social justice curriculum for Cities of Peace/Jane Addams Hull House, The Teacher Institute/ Museum of Contemporary Art, Office of Arts and Education at Chicago Public Schools and has conducted workshop series for Chicago Park District Young Cultural Stewards and Art Seed teaching artists. She has also worked with sexual, domestic violence and human trafficking survivors and Cambodian youth refugees. Rochele is a member of the Board of Directors for the American Art Therapy Association. In Summer 2021, Rochele will join Syracuse University as Assistant Professor of Art Therapy in the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

References

- Akhtar, S., Kramer, S., & Parens, H. (Eds.). (1995). *The birth of hatred: Developmental, clinical, and technical aspects of intense aggression*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Ayers, R. (2015). *An empty seat in class: Teaching and learning after the death of a student*. Teachers College Press.

- Barndt, D. (2008). Touching minds and hearts: Community arts as collaborative research. In J. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 352-363). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226545>.
- Basu, M. (2014). One day of gun violence. CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/12/us/cnn-guns-project/24-hours.html>.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.117.3.497>.
- Bratich, J. Z., & Brush, H. M. (2011). Fabricating activism: Craft-work, popular culture, gender. *Utopian Studies*, 22(2), 233-260, <http://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.22.2.0233>.
- Campbell, J., Moyers, B. D., & Flowers, B. S. (2012). *The power of myth*. Turtleback Books.
- Chansky, R. A. (2010). A stitch in time: Third-wave feminist reclamation of needled imagery. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 43(4), 681-700, <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00765.x>.
- Cleveland, W. (2000). *Art in other places: Artists at work in America's community and social institutions*. Praeger.
- Decter, J., & Draxler, H. (2014). *Exhibition as social intervention: 'Culture in action' 1993*. Afterall.
- Dickie, V. A. (2010). Experiencing therapy through doing: Making quilts. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 31(4), 209-215, <http://doi.org/10.3928/15394492-20101222-02>.
- Doka, K. J. (2003). Memorialization, ritual and public tragedy. In M. Lattanzi-Licht & K. J. Doka (Eds.), *Living with grief: Coping with public tragedy* (pp. 179-189). Brunner-Routledge.
- Faulkner, R. O., Goelet, O., & Dassow, V. E. (2015). *The Egyptian book of the dead: The book of going forth by day*. Chronicle Books.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. P. (2012). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Heine, S., & Wright, D. S. (2008). *Zen ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist theory in practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Helguera, P. (2011). *Education for socially engaged art: A materials and techniques handbook*. Jorge Pinto Books.
- Hills-Evans, K., Mitton, J., & Sacks, C. A. (2018). Stop posturing and start problem solving: A call for research to prevent gun violence. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 20(1), 77-83, <http://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2018.20.1.pfor1-1801>.
- Jung, C. G., & Campbell, J. (1971). *The portable Jung*. Viking Press.
- Jung, C. G., & Franz, M. V. (1964). *Man and his symbols*. Doubleday.
- Jung, C. G., Read, H., Fordham, M., & Adler, G. (Eds.). (1971). *The collected works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 9: The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Routledge.
- Kellermann, A. L., & Rivara, F. P. (2013). Silencing the science on gun research. *JAMA*, 309(6), 549-550, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2012.208207>.
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design*. The Guilford Press.
- Margry, P. J., & Sánchez-Carretero, C. (2011). *Grassroots memorials: The politics of memorializing traumatic death*. Berghahn Books.
- Maslow, A. H. (1958). A Dynamic Theory of Human Motivation. In C. L. Stacey & M. DeMartino (Eds.), *Understanding human motivation* (pp. 26-47). Howard Allen Publishers. <https://content.apa.org/doi/10.1037/11305-004>.
- McLellan, D. (1973). *Karl Marx: His life and thought*. Macmillan.
- Moon, B. L. (2007). *The role of metaphor in art therapy: Theory, method, and experience*. Charles C. Thomas.
- Olson, B. D., Cooper, G. C., Viola, J. J., & Clark, B. (2016). Community narratives. In L. Jason & D. Glenwick (Eds.), *Handbook of methodological approaches to community-based research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods* (pp. 43-52). Oxford University Press.

- Rappaport, J. (2000). Community narratives: Tales of terror and joy. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(1), 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005161528817>.
- Rose, I. (2009). *School violence: Studies in alienation, revenge, and redemption*: Karnac Books.
- Smith, P. (2020, December 28). Here's why Chicago's gun violence in 2020 is probably not a sign of things to come. *WBEZChicago*. <https://www.wbez.org/stories/heres-why-chicagos-gun-violence-in-2020-is-probably-not-a-sign-of-things-to-come/a5325d7e-7648-473d-9376-1af29eed3f5>.
- Struett, D. (2020, November 1). Chicago gun violence still up 50% through end of October as other crime falls. *Chicago Sun Times*. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/crime/2020/11/1/21544510/chicago-gun-violence-statistics-homicide-shooting-cpd-police>.
- Weingarten, K. (1996). *Cultural resistance: Challenging beliefs about men, women, and therapy*: Haworth.
- Wire, S. (2020, August 10). 40 shot, 4 Fatally, in Chicago this weekend. *Chicago Sun Times*. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/crime/2020/8/9/21360523/chicago-weekend-shootings-gun-violence-august-7-10>.
- Young, K. (2016, December 16). The effects of toxic stress on the brain & body – How to heal & protect. *Hey Sigmund*. <http://www.heysigmund.com/toxic-stress/>